

Expressing possession with *have* and *be*:

a view from Flemish ¹

Contents

1. Introduction: Flemish Event Possessives (EvPs)
2. The Nominative-Dative alternation in possessive *have* and *be*
3. Flemish event possessives' matrix subjects are affectees
4. Tentative analysis: the EvP matrix subjects are very high applicatives
5. The Flemish External Possessor (FEP): Flemish has a very high applicative position
6. Further questions
7. Conclusion

1. Introduction: Flemish Event Possessives (EvPs)

- The possession of an event ('something has happened to me') = Event Possessives (EvPs).
 - Matrix introduces argument that 'possesses' the event expressed in the embedded clause.
- Two 'alternating' varieties in Flemish² (1a-b):

- *hebben* ('have'; (1a))
- *zijn* ('be'; (1b))³.

- (1) a. *We hebben (**het**) nog gehad dat onze valiezen plots openscheurden.*
we.NOM have it PRT⁴ had that our suitcases suddenly open-ripped
- b. *We zijn (***het**) nog geweest dat onze valiezen plots openscheurden.*
we.NOM are it PRT been that our suitcases suddenly open-ripped
- 'We've had it happen to us that our suitcases suddenly ripped open.'

- Similar *have* – *be* alternations involving possession exist in Heerlen Dutch (Broekhuis & Cornips 1994):

¹ Thanks go to Liliane Haegeman and Lieven Danckaert for their feedback, suggestions and data.

² Note: Standard Netherlandic Dutch also has the *have*-EvP sentence but not the *be*-EvP.

³ The *be*-EvP is not accepted by all speakers of Flemish, but is attested. This may have to do with the large regional variation in language use in Flanders.

⁴ PRT = particle

Expressing possession with *have* and *be*: Flemish Event Possessives

(2) a. Hem is de fietsband lek.

him.DAT is the bike tire punctured

b. Hij heeft de fietsband lek.

he.NOM has the bike tire punctured

‘He has a punctured bike tire.’

(B&C: 180, (22c) and (21c); my paraphrase)

- Broekhuis & Cornips’ analysis of these sentences is in line with the common analysis of *have* as *be*+preposition/case (a.o. Benveniste 1966, Kayne 1993, Den Dikken 1997):
 - o the possessor in the *be* structure is interpreted as an underlying indirect object surfacing with a dative case ((2a), (3a)).
 - o the possessor in the *have* structure has a nominative case ((2b), (3b)).

(3) a. [Hem.DAT.IO [**is** [SC de fietsband lek]]]

b. [Hij.NOM.S [**had** [SC de fietsband lek]]]

- The EvPs are similar in structure to the Flemish External Possession pattern (FEP; (4)) (Haegeman & Danckaert 2011):

(4) Het is jammer dat [**Pieter**] dan net [**zijn stoel**] omver gevallen was.

it is too bad that Pieter then just his chair over fallen was

‘It is too bad that Pieter’s chair had fallen over just then.’

- The possessor in this pattern does not reside in a DP-internal position; instead the possessor occupies a higher position in the clause (see also Deal 2011; 2013a; 2013b).
- The possessor and the possessee are structurally distant from each other.
- The regular ‘internal’ possessor DP does not allow an adjunct to come in between the possessor and the possessee:

(5) [**Pieter zijn stoel**] viel dan net omver

Peter his chair fell then just over

‘Peter’s chair fell over just then.’

Expressing possession with *have* and *be*: Flemish Event Possessives

- **Puzzle:** why is there no regular nominative-dative alternation in the Flemish event possessives?
- **Hypothesis:** the matrix subject in the event possessive does not only possess the event but is also affected by it and is thus forced into a higher clausal position surfacing as nominative in both the *hebben*- and the *zijn*-variety.
- **Main points of argumentation:**
 - Expected pattern for *be*-EvP: dative case matrix subject → *be*-EvP deviates from this.
 - Matrix subjects in EvPs = affectees (= semantic role expressing that the constituent is affected by the event expressed in the sentence).
 - This affectee-property results in the deviating case assignment because it forces a larger distance between the possessor and the possessee than is usual in possessor-only patterns. This higher position is supposedly an applicative.
 - The syntax of the EvP can be related to that of the FEP.

2. The Nominative-Dative alternation in possessive *have* and *be*

2.1. General background

- The nominative-dative alternation in possessive *have* and *be* has long been observed: Benveniste (1966), looking at a.o. Latin (6a-b) first hypothesized that *have* be analyzed as *be* + a preposition.

- (6) a. Mihi **est** pecunia.
 I.DAT *is* *money.NOM*

‘I have money.’ (Lit. ‘To me is money.’)

- b. **Habeo** pecuniam.

have.1s *money.ACC*

‘I have money.’

(Benveniste 1966:197; my glosses)

→ *be*-sentence (‘est’): the possessee is the subject and the possessor receives the oblique dative case.

→ *have*-sentence (‘habeo’): the possessor is the subject.

- Note: the meaning of the *have*-EvP and that of the *be*-EvP is the same.

Expressing possession with *have* and *be*: Flemish Event Possessives

- *Be* in the *be*-EvP does exhibit its possessive use. An existential meaning for (1b) where a human would be equated with an event is semantically illogical.
- Freeze (1992), approaches the similarities between *be* and *have* from a different viewpoint, namely by examining the locative quality of *have*. *Have* (7c) has the same underlying structure (8) as the predicate locative (7a) and the existential (7b). This underlying structure involves a(n abstract) preposition.

- (7) a. Predicate locative: The book **is** on the bench.
 b. Existential: There **is** a book on the bench.
 c. 'Have': Lupe **has** a book. (Freeze 1992: 553 (1a,b,c))

- (8) [IP [SPEC e] [I' [I] [PP [SPEC NP] [P' P NP]]]]
 I: [+AGR], [+LOC] (Freeze 1992: 558 (7))

→ The predicate locative is [-human] and [+definite].

Possessee: subject; location: object.

→ The existential is [-human] and [-definite].

Existential: subject; possessee: object; location: adjunct

→ Possessive *have* is [+human].

Can be spelled out as *have* (but does not have to! see Finnish (9a-b)).

It only spells out as *have* when the location moves but leaves behind its preposition immediately next to I. The preposition can then be incorporated into I resulting in spell-out *have*.

- (9) a. Pöydä-lla **on** kynä.
 table-ADESSIVE *COP[+LOC]* *pencil*
 'There is a pencil on the table.'

- b. Liisa-lla **on** mies.
 Liisa-ADESSIVE *COP[+LOC]* *man*

'Liisa has a husband.'

(Freeze 1992: 577 (51a-b))

2.2. Possessive *have* and *be* structures in Netherlandic (Heerlen) Dutch

- Copular possessive constructions in Dutch (Broekhuis & Cornips, 1994):

- (10) a. Zijn handen **zijn** vies. (Standard Dutch)

Expressing possession with *have* and *be*: Flemish Event Possessives

his hands.NOM are dirty

‘His hands are dirty.’

b. Hem **zijn** de handen vies. (possessive dative, copular, Heerlen Dutch)

he.DAT are the hands dirty

(Lit.) ‘His hands are dirty to him.’

c. Hij **heeft** de handen vies. (possessive dative as surface subject)

he.NOM has the hands dirty

‘He has dirty hands.’ (Broekhuis & Cornips: 180 (20a, 21a, 22a); my paraphrases)

[hem_{DAT.IO} [is [sc de fietsband lek_{NOM}]]]

[hij_{NOM.S} [had [sc de fietsband lek_{ACC}]]]

- *be*: - assigns dative case to the possessor ((10b), (2a)).
- dative case is assigned structurally.
- *have*: - cannot assign dative case to the possessor.
→ possessor moves to the subject surface position.
- can assign accusative case.
- undative verb ((10c), (2b)).

2.3. EvPs and the possessive *have* and *be* alternations

- Difference between the Heerlen Dutch sentences and the Flemish EvPs:
 - The Heerlen Dutch sentences involve a small clause possessee.
 - The Heerlen Dutch sentences express the possession of a state, not the possession of an event.
- - *Have*-EvPs allow the presence of *het* (‘it’) in the matrix; *be*-EvPs do not allow this ((11a-b) = (1a-b)).

(11)a. We hebben **(het)** nog **gehad** dat onze valiezen plots
we.NOM have it PRT had that our suitcases suddenly
openscheurden.
open-ripped

b. We zijn **(*het)** nog **geweest** dat onze valiezen plots

Expressing possession with *have* and *be*: Flemish Event Possessives

we.NOM are it PRT been that our suitcases suddenly
openscheurden.

open-ripped

‘We’ve had it happen to us that our suitcases suddenly ripped open.’

- *Het*-availability in *have*-EvP follows from B&C’s analysis of the Heerlen Dutch sentences: following Broekhuis & Cornips’s proposal that undative *have* is an accusative case assigner, I analyse the pronoun *het* as an accusative direct object coreferential with the extraposed embedded *that*-clause ((11a), (12)).

(12) [we.NOM [hebben [(het.ACC_i)] [nog gehad [dat [onze valiezen] plots openscheurden_i]]]]

- *Be* is incapable of assigning accusative case and does not have a slot in its structure for a direct object → ungrammaticality of *het* (‘it’) with *be*-EvPs (11b) is predicted.

➤ The matrix subject of the *be*-EvP should be a dative.

2.4. Flemish has a dative

- It is not the absence of the dative case in the Flemish nominal case paradigm that is forcing the matrix subject of the *be*-sentences to be nominative (deflection).

Flemish has a fragile class of verbs and adjectives that show a contrast between the 3rd.sg.f. pronouns *eur* and *ze* (‘she/her’):

- *Eur* and *ze* can both be used for the accusative.
- In some dative contexts *eur* seems to at least have a strong preference over *ze*.
- So, *eur* can be both accusative and dative, whilst *ze* cannot express dative.

(13)a. Het is **eur** waard.

it is her.DAT worth

‘It’s worth it for her.’

b. *Het is **ze** waard.

itis her.ACC worth

Expressing possession with *have* and *be*: Flemish Event Possessives

- This dative pronoun leads to ungrammaticality when inserted in the matrix subject of the EvPs:

- (14) a. *Eur heeft nog **gehad** dat eur valiezen plots openscheurden.
she.DAT has PRT had that her suitcases suddenly open-ripped
b. *Eur is nog **geweest** dat eur valiezen plots openscheurden.
she.DAT is PRT been that her suitcases suddenly open-ripped
'She has had it happen to her that her suitcases suddenly ripped open.'

2.5. Mid-conclusion

- Flemish EvPs show a deviation from the regular *be-have* alternation in possessive/locative sentences.
- The analysis presented by Broekhuis and Cornips (1994) does not suffice to explain the nominative in the matrix subject of the *be*-EvPs (and presumably the *have*-EvPs where the same syntactic operation could be present without it overtly showing).

3. Flemish event possessives' matrix subjects are affectees

3.1. Affectees and applicatives: background information

➤ **Affectees:**

- semantic role assigned to the constituent affected by what is expressed in the sentence.
- tests for affectedness:

- Ban on dead arguments (see also Hole 2006):

- (15)* Het overkomt **Jans dode grootvader** dat zijn huis nu verkocht moet
itbefalls Jan's dead grandfather that his house now sold has.to
worden.
become

'It befalls Jan's dead grandfather that his house now has to be sold.'

- Sentences where affection of the argument is semantically illogical:

- (16)* Het overkomt **me** dat het lijk van Toetanchamon voor een vijfde
itbefalls me that the body of Tutanchamon for a fifth
keer door wetenschappers onderzocht wordt.
time by scientists examined is.being

Expressing possession with *have* and *be*: Flemish Event Possessives

‘It befalls me that Tutanchamon’s body is being examined by scientists for a fifth time.’

➤ **Applicatives:**

= Arguments added onto a sentence to augment the structure (basic structure in (17a), applicative *him* added in (17b)):

(17)a. I baked a cake.

b. I baked **him** a cake.

(Pylkkänen 2000:197 (1a-b))

Pylkkänen (2000) proposes two kinds of applicatives: a high one and a low one.

- High applicative:
 - Attaches an individual onto the verbal event.
 - Between VoiceP and VP.
 - Example: Chaga (18).

(18) n-“a-“i-lyì-í-à m- kà k-élyá

FOC-1s-PR-eat-APPL-FV 1-wife 7-food

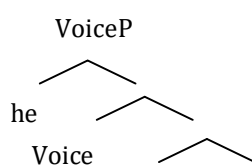
‘He is eating food for his wife.’

(Bresnan and Moshi 1993 in Pylkkänen 2000: 197(2a))

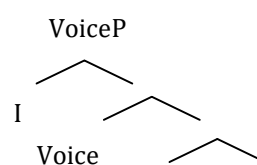
- Low applicative:
 - Attaches an individual onto the DO.
 - Between VP and DO.
 - Example: English (17b).

Syntactically Pylkkänen (2000) represents this as follows:

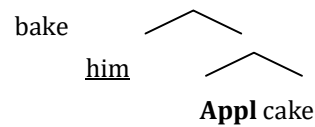
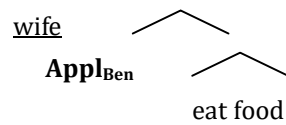
(19)a. High Applicative (Chaga)



b. Low Applicative (English)



Expressing possession with *have* and *be*: Flemish Event Possessives



(Pylkkänen 2009: 199 (6a-b))

- Rivero (2009) proposes an even higher applicative for a.o. Bulgarian Involuntary State Constructions:

- Above the TP.
- Attaches an individual to the whole sentence.
- Example: Bulgarian involuntary state constructions (20):

(20) **Na Ivan mu se** "etjaja knigi.

P Ivan 3Sg.Dat Refl read.Imp.3Pl book.Pl

‘John[sic] {was in the mood/desired} to read books.’ (Rivero 2009: 147, (1b))

- This is the position that is most likely compatible with the EvP’s matrix subjects’ positions, since it also seems to scope over the entire TP.⁵

(21) [_{AppIP} NP_{DAT} [_{Appl} Appl [_{TP} Tense [_{AspP} IMP^{OP} vP [_v VP]]]]]. (Rivero 2009: 147, (3))

3.2. Semantic tests: Flemish EvP’s subject is an affectee

➤ ‘Ban on the dead possessor’-test:

(22)a. ***Mijn opa die al dood is van vorig jaar** heeft het dit jaar
my grandfather who already dead is of last year has it this year

nog gehad dat Jada met zijn fiets rondreed.

PRT had that Jada with his bike around.ride

‘My grandfather, who passed away last year, has had it happen to him this year that Jada rode around on his bike.’

b. **Mijn opa** heeft het nog gehad dat Jada met zijn
my grandfather has it PRT had that Jada with his

fiets rondreed en hij te voet moest gaan.

bike around.ride and he on foot had.to go

‘My grandfather had it happen that Jada rode around on his bike and he had to go on foot.’

⁵ For more on applicatives, see Kim (2011; 2012), Pylkkänen (2002), and Rivero & Arregui (2010).

Expressing possession with *have* and *be*: Flemish Event Possessives

- The possessor *my grandfather* cannot occur in the EvP pattern if he is dead and thus unable to be affected by the event expressed in the extraposed clause (22a).
 - If the possessor is still alive he is able to be affected by the event expressed in the extraposed clause and is thus available in the EvP (22b).
- Possessors that are not logically able to be affected by the event expressed in the extraposed clause do not occur in the EvPs:

○ Inanimate possessors:

(23)* **De kast** heeft het nog gehad dat de muizen aan de planken
the closet has it PRT had that the mice on the shelves
 knaagden.
gnawed

‘The closet has had it happen that the mice gnawed on its shelves.’

○ Events that do not affect the matrix subject:

(24) **Ik** heb gehad dat **Jan** naar school moest *(en dat betekende
I have had that Jan to school had.to and that meant
 dat **ik** eindelijk weer rustig kon werken).
that I finally again in.peace could work

‘I’ve had it happen that Jan had to go to school *(and that meant that I finally could work in peace again).’

○ Matching pronouns⁶:

(25)a. ??**We** zijn nog geweest dat **mijn** boekentas op school zomaar
we.NOM are PRT been that my backpack at school just.like.that
 openbarstte en dat alles eruit viel.
open.burst and that everything it.out fell

⁶ As pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, this also shows that the possessive pronoun in the embedded clause is derivationally linked to the matrix subject.

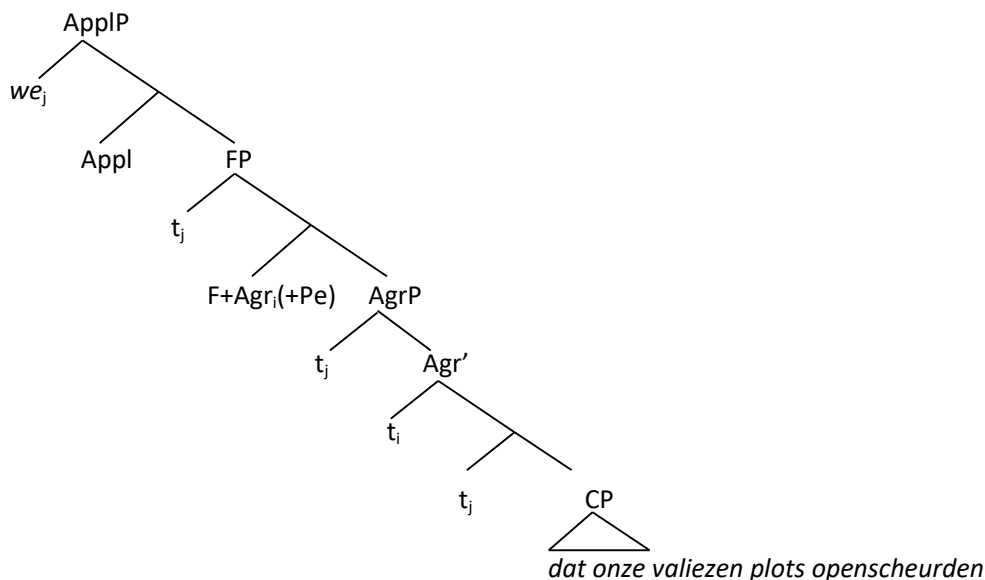
Expressing possession with *have* and *be*: Flemish Event Possessives

‘We’ve had it happen that my backpack burst open and that everything fell out of it.’

b. **Ik** ben nog geweest dat **mijn** boekentas op school zomaar
I.NOM am PRT been that my backpack at school just.like.that
 openbarstte en dat alles eruit viel.
open.burst and that everything it.out fell

‘I’ve had it happen that my backpack burst open and that everything fell out of it.’

4. Tentative analysis: the EvP matrix subjects are very high applicatives⁷



- Following Belvin & Den Dikken 1997 I assume *have* spells out:
 the functional head F incorporating the small clause Agr head and the empty preposition Pe.
- I thus treat the EvPs as small clauses with a full clause propositional object.
- In the case of the *be*-EvP, the empty prepositional element does not move to the functional head F and F+Agr spell out as *be*.

⁷ These are a tentative analyses; I do not have anything to say about what exactly the relationship is between the subject position and the applicative position (movement? binding?).

Expressing possession with *have* and *be*: Flemish Event Possessives

Various derivational steps can be assumed:

4.1. Have-evP

- (26) *We* hebben **(het)** nog **gehad** dat onze valiezen plots openscheurden.
we.NOM have (it) PRT had that our suitcases suddenly open-ripped
'We've had it happen to us that our suitcases suddenly ripped open.'

➤ Step 1:⁸

The non-applicative (underlying) sentence⁹: F+Agr spell out as *be*; expletive *het* is inserted as matrix subject.

- (27) *Het* is nog **geweest** dat onze valiezen plots openscheurden.
it is PRT been that our suitcases suddenly openripped
Lit. 'It has happened that our suitcases suddenly ripped open.'

➤ Step 2:

Event possessor is added as part of the small clause with full clause propositional object. *Het* remains as expletive matrix subject.

- (28) *Het* is **ons.DAT** nog **geweest** dat onze valiezen plots openscheurden.
it is we.DAT PRT been that our suitcases suddenly open.ripped
Lit. 'It has been to us that our suitcases suddenly ripped open.'

➤ Step 3:

- Event possessor moves out of the small clause, via SpecAgrP to SpecFP, the matrix subject position.
- The abstract preposition *Pe* moves up and remains behind immediately next to F and Agr, which has moved up too.
- The preposition incorporates into F and Agr and gets spelled out as *have*.

⁸ It is not clear yet which of the steps in the derivation are grammatical as independent sentences and why. Some of them certainly do occur, whilst others seem less grammatical. Further research must be done on this.

⁹ A non-applicative *have*-sentence is not possible. Non-applicative sentences do not involve an affected indirect dative object. If there is no indirect dative object present, it is not possible for the inflection to incorporate an abstract preposition and spell out as *have*. It has to spell out as *be*.

Expressing possession with *have* and *be*: Flemish Event Possessives

- *Have* assigns nominative case to its 'undative' matrix subject.
- *Have* can assign accusative case to its direct object *het*.

(29) Wij hebben(**het**) nog gehad dat onze valiezen plots openscheurden.
we.NOM have it PRT had that our suitcases suddenly open.ripped
Lit. 'We have (it) had that our suitcases suddenly ripped open.'

➤ Step 4:

- The event possessor moves to SpecApplP, an applicative position higher than the subject position, where it receives an affected reading.
- The event possessor receives nominative case here.
- In the surface structure of the *have*-EvP, this does not result in a change of case.

(30) Wij hebben(het) nog gehad dat onze valiezen plots openscheurden.
we.NOM have it PRT had that our suitcases suddenly open.ripped
'We've had it happen to us that our suitcases suddenly ripped open.'
(Lit. 'We have (it) had that our suitcases suddenly ripped open.')

4.2. Be-evP

(31) We zijn (***het**) nog geweest dat onze valiezen plots openscheurden.
*we.NOM are (*it) PRT been that our suitcases suddenly open-ripped*
'We've had it happen to us that our suitcases suddenly ripped open.'

➤ Step 1:

- The non-applicative (underlying) sentence: F+Agr spell out as *be*; expletive *het* is inserted as matrix subject.
- (Same as *have*-EvP step 1.)

(32) Het is nog geweest dat onze valiezen plots openscheurden.
it is PRT been that our suitcases suddenly openripped
Lit. 'It has happened that our suitcases suddenly ripped open.'

➤ Step 2:

Expressing possession with *have* and *be*: Flemish Event Possessives

- Event possessor is added as part of the small clause with full clause propositional object. *Het* remains as expletive matrix subject.
- (Same as *have*-EvP step 2.)

(33) *Het* is **ons.DAT** nog **geweest** dat onze valiezen plots openscheurden.
it is we.DAT PRT been that our suitcases suddenly open.ripped
Lit. 'It has been to us that our suitcases suddenly ripped open.'

➤ Step 3:

- Event possessor moves out of the small clause, via SpecAgrP to SpecFP, the matrix subject position.
- The abstract preposition does not remain in F+Agr, but instead moves up to SpecFP together with the subject.
- The possessor thus remains in its dative form.
- The abstract preposition is not immediately next to the functional head and thus F+Agr does not incorporate the abstract preposition and remains spelled out as *be*.
- Possessive *be* cannot assign accusative case to *het* ('it').

(34) *Ons* is nog **geweest** dat onze valiezen plots openscheurden.
we.DAT is PRT been that our suitcases suddenly open.ripped
Lit. 'To us is been that our suitcases suddenly ripped open.'

➤ Step 4:

- The event possessor moves to SpecApplP, an applicative position higher than the subject position, where it receives an affected reading.
- The event possessor receives nominative case here.
- In the surface structure of the *be*-EvP this results in a change of case from dative to nominative for the event possessor.

(35) *Wij* zijn (***het**) nog **geweest** dat onze valiezen plots openscheurden.
we.NOM are it PRT been that our suitcases suddenly open.ripped
Lit. 'We are been that our suitcases suddenly ripped open.'
'We've had it happen to us that our suitcases suddenly ripped open.'

5. The Flemish External Possessor (FEP): Flemish has a very high applicative position

5.1. The Flemish External Possessor: what?

- Possessor is separated from its possessee by an adjunct (4, repeated here as 36).

→ Possessor is external to the DP.

The distance between the possessor and possessee is larger than in DP-internal possessor patterns (5) (Haegeman & Danckaert 2011).

- (36) Het is jammer dat [**Pieter**] dan net [**zijn stoel**] omver gevallen was.
it is too bad that Pieter then just his chair over fallen was
'It is too bad that Pieter's chair had fallen over just then.'

- The external possessor scopes over VoiceP.

Haegeman & Danckaert (2011) propose that the external possessor resides in a very high applicative phrase, higher than the high applicative phrase proposed in Pytkänen (2000).

→ Flemish has an independently motivated very high applicative phrase.

5.2. Similarities between the FEP and the EvP

- The external possessor in FEP is an affected argument (ban on dead possessor):

- (37) Ik vertelde dat [**mijn grootvader**] jammergenoeg [zijn fiets] gestolen was.
I told that my grandfather unfortunately his bike stolen was
'I told that my grandfather's bike unfortunately had been stolen.'

→ (37) is only possible if the grandfather is still alive.

- In both the FEP and the EvP the structural distance between the possessor and the possessee is larger than in regular possessive patterns.
- The aspect of the verb seems to have an effect on the availability of an affectee/high applicative in both the FEP and the EvP:
 - EvPs seem to only be available with a perfective/repetitive aspect.

Expressing possession with *have* and *be*: Flemish Event Possessives

(38)* We **hebben/zijn** nu dat onze valiezen plots openscheuren.
we.NOM have/are now that our suitcases suddenly open-rip

- FEPs seem to prefer a stative/resultative predicate; they also do not allow a possessee agent, which results in degraded transitive sentences (Haegeman & Danckaert 2011):

(39)a. *?? Het moet lukken dat [Lieven] toen juist [zijn moeder] een
It has.to happen that Lieven then just his mother an
appartement **gekocht** had.

apartment bought had

‘It so happens that Lieven’s mother just then had bought a flat.’

b. ? Het moest lukken dat [Lieven] toen juist [zijn moeder] een
It had.to happen that Lieven then just his mother an
appartement **geërfd** had.

apartment inherited had

‘It so happened that Lieven’s mother just then had inherited a flat.’

c. ? Het moet lukken dat [Lieven] toen juist [zijn moeder] **de**
It had.to happen that Lieven then just his mother the
griep had.

flu had

‘It so happens that Lieven’s mother just then had the flu.’

(Haegeman & Danckaert 2011: 4 (14a, b,c); my glosses)

Suggestion: the very high applicative position is related to an aspectual verb layer?

- A slightly puzzling fact: why would an applicative force a change from dative to nominative?
(Subject-related) FEP also has a nominative in its very high applicative position.

Suggestion: the nominative as a default case for the very high applicative?

- The exact position of this very high applicative phrase is not clear (somewhere inbetween C and T).

Expressing possession with *have* and *be*: Flemish Event Possessives

CONCLUSION: In both the FEP and the EvP, affectedness of the possessor seems to imply a larger structural distance between the possessor and the possessee than in regular possessor patterns.

6. Further questions

- In what circumstances does dative case appear in Flemish?
- Is *het* ('it') in the *have*-EvP (1a) really a direct object pronoun and what is the relation between *het* and the embedded clause?
- What is the role of the aspect in both the FEP and the EvPs?

7. Conclusion

- The affectee role of the matrix subject of the EvPs forces the matrix subject into a higher applicative position, which results in a change of case from dative to nominative for the *be*-EvP matrix subject.
- This very high applicative position is independently motivated for Flemish by the FEP pattern: the EvP seems to express the affected possession of an event, whereas the FEP expresses the affected possession of a state.
- These data suggest that affected arguments can be syntactically located in applicative phrases.
- If the affected argument is also a possessor, this results in a larger structural distance between the possessor and the possessee.

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Expressing possession with *have* and *be*: Flemish Event Possessives

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